

RETAILING MANAGEMENT

11E

Newsletter for Instructors

October
2026

[COMMENTS?](#)
[CONTACT US](#)

Here Are the Fifty Best Clothing Stores in the United States. Do You Agree?.....	1
Use with Chapter 1, "Introduction to the World of Retailing"	
Sears, Where America Shops—Until It Wasn't.....	3
Use with Chapter 2, "Types of Retailers"	
Even for Tech Firms, Interpersonal Retailing Remains Key	4
Use with Chapter 3, "Digital Retailing"	
Baby Steps: Little Spoon Revolutionizes Baby Food	5
Use with Chapter 4, "Multichannel and Omnichannel Retailing"	
Everything's Coming Up Rubirosa's: Inside the New Favorite of the Paris Fashion Crowd.....	6
Use with Chapter 6, "Retail Market Strategy"	
The Global Spread of Chinese Food Trends, from Bubble Tea to Hot Pot and Beyond	7
Use with Chapter 9, "Retail Site Location"	
How Major Retailers Are Tackling Self-Checkout Theft	8
Use with Chapter 12, "Managing the Merchandise Planning Process," and Chapter 17, "Store Layout, Design, and Visual Merchandising"	
In the Novel Popcorn Bucket Market, Movie Theaters Confront an Age-Old Challenge: Buying Just the Right Amount.....	10
Use with Chapter 13, "Buying Merchandise"	
Tip the Scales: Food Delivery Platforms Attempt to Block Tipping Laws	12
Use with Chapter 16, "Human Resources and Managing the Store"	
Quiet Hours for Shopping: How Retailers Aim for Accommodation	13
Use with Chapter 17, "Store Layout, Design, and Visual Merchandising"	
Tidbits.....	14

If you are interested in the textbook please click [here](#). If you would like to see this newsletter and the previous editions, go to: <http://www.theretailingmanagement.com/newsletters>

11E

RETAILING
MANAGEMENT

LEVY
GREWAL



Here Are the Fifty Best Clothing Stores in the United States. Do You Agree?

Use with Chapter 1, “Introduction to the World of Retailing”



istockphoto / Pressmaster

In November 2025, The New York Times published a list of the 50 best clothing stores in the United States. Its “Style” section has a powerful and devoted audience of readers, who acknowledge its cultural relevance and the strength of its fashion reporting. Thus, in presenting an admittedly subjective editorial, making such a debate-inducing claim, the reporters had to take great care in establishing the criteria that define what makes a clothing store “the best.”

They present those criteria from the start. In describing the conception of this project, the authors note that their goal was to identify a specific kind of immersive fashion retail, with the ability to transform the shopper. Therefore, The New York Times argues that the best clothing stores

are the ones that enable customers to slip the confines of their existing identity, however they perceive it to be, and thereby allow them to imagine how they would feel as some other variation of themselves, which they can construct with the assistance of the retailer. Furthermore, the authors distill their assessment of the stores themselves down to a direct requirement: Visiting these stores should “be worth it, even if nothing is bought.”

Notably, many of the listed retailers are very specific in their targeting and focus. One entry offers Japanese denim. Another is the House of Bijan, a clothing retailer founded by a Persian designer who specialized in Italian tailoring and who has long been a favorite of presidents, prime ministers, and other world leaders. A somewhat more affordable, Chicago-based retailer is even more specialized: It is known for its vaquero wear, which is inspired by the clothing that Mexican cattle herders traditionally would have worn.

Some consistency arises in the type of businesses represented. In particular, the list hosts a high proportion of family-run businesses, many of which have entered their third or fourth generation. Hirshleifers, a department store in Long Island that specializes in premium offerings, has been passed on to its fifth generation of family ownership.

In addition, the founders of these excellent retailers often describe their business plan as based in their own preferences and consumption demands. Sid Mashburn began his eponymous label almost 20 years ago because he could not find high-quality, traditional Italian tailoring available in colors and styles that would be well-suited to his Atlanta, Georgia, location. The store sells boiled peanuts alongside its luxury suits for the same reason—Mashburn likes them, they appeal to southern shoppers, and in addition, no one else is doing it.

The retail spaces created by these innovative retailers offer powerfully experiential interactions, with both visual and tactile appeals woven throughout the stores. Thus, the “Style” arbiters often use deeply descriptive terms to explain their preferences for the best stores, whether by invoking the feeling of being a tourist in Paris, created by a store that encourages shoppers to experiment with a new look, “much like the visitor to Paris feels they could wear a beret.” A well-designed and expansively furnished store in Vail, Colorado, influenced by European Alpine culture, created such a sense of place that it can “transport visitors to the Alps.”

What is largely missing from the list are retail locations that follow mass production or fast fashion trends. Instead, many of the featured retailers explicitly embrace a sustainable production model. They include premium and vintage resale stores, like the Church Mouse in West Palm Beach, Florida, which offers designer clothing and antique furniture that has been discarded

by local residents. A retail store called Equipment in Minneapolis, Minnesota, sources its offerings from a large number of international brands, none of which produce on an industrial scale.

Finally, some of the favored stores appear to differentiate themselves on the basis of good taste. The Cuffs boutique maintains only one location, in a quiet suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. But the compact, two-story boutique boasts the only privately owned Hermès shop in North America, operated as a subsidiary of the larger store. The tiny retailer and the globally renowned French fashion house have come to an agreement that ensures that Cuffs can exhibit its own creative freedom, without ever presenting the luxury brand in a way that would undermine its value.

The list also offers a fascinating look at the state of modern retail and the businesses that define it. Its very existence stems from a clear respect for the enduring appeal of brick-and-mortar fashion retail stores, for their capacity to make finding a wardrobe a joyful, exciting, rewarding activity. Even just reading the descriptions, and considering (and perhaps critiquing) the reasoning underlying the choices that created this list, can allow fans of fashion to feel some of the magic that great retailing provides.

Discussion Questions

1. How do these varied stores all effectively fulfill the central purposes of retailing?
2. Offer your own criteria of what makes a retailer the “best.” Are they similar to or different from those that the authors of The New York Times article applied?

Sources: Steven Kurutz, Misty White Sidell, Jon Caramanica, Gina Cherelus, Miya Lee, Alex Vadukul, Jacob Gallagher, Stella Bugbee, and Sadiba Hasan, “The 50 Best Clothing Stores in America,” The New York Times, November 30, 2025; Mariyam Muhammad, “This Ohio Luxury Shop Named 1 of the 50 Best Clothing Stores in the US,” Akron Beacon Journal, December 10, 2025; Torey Van Oot, “Minneapolis Menswear Shop Makes New York Times’ List of America’s Best Clothing Stores,” Axios Twin Cities, December 3, 2025.

Sears, Where America Shops—Until It Wasn't

Use with Chapter 2, "Types of Retailers"



istockphoto / LindaJoHeilman

For more than a century, Sears Roebuck was one of the most dominant retailers in the United States. Even well into the 1990s, at a time that its reputation for high-quality clothing and home goods had faded a bit, and direct competition had flooded into the same retail space, Sears was able to pivot and carve out a profitable niche for itself. From appliances to hardware, footwear to home décor, Sears promised that consumers could trust it for all their purchasing needs, building on the security of a decades-long reputation for quality and affordability.

Yet by the end of 2025, only a handful of Sears locations remained, none of which were doing very well. In response, the retailer's corporate ownership announced plans to close and liquidate the last of the physical holdings, in an attempt to pay off a \$1.5 billion loan that it had taken out in its efforts to maintain operations. What went so very wrong?

Most experts agree that the company's change in ownership in 2005 was a first major mistake. Edward Lampert took over Sears and its subsidiaries, and the initial response was promising. In particular, share prices for the company rose after the new leadership team initiated spending cuts designed to trim away any excess. But it turns out that what they trimmed was less fat and more like vital organs. Lampert implemented expansive sell-offs of once-valuable assets under the company's umbrella, like Lands' End, rather than investing further in attempting to turn their performance around. Instead, the executives channeled their budgets to the introduction of an expansive omnichannel program that would support order-ahead and in-store pick-up capabilities. The problem was that by that time, other retailers already had established such capabilities, such that Sears was left scrambling to catch up with the appealing offerings of competitors like Home Depot and Walmart.

In the meantime, Lampert functioned in multiple roles: Sears' largest shareholder and chair, as well as the CEO of ESL Investments, a hedge fund that served as one of the department store's major creditors. This status raised some ethical questions, but undeterred, Lampert also founded a real estate holding company called Seritage in 2015. Seritage then entered into a leaseback agreement with Sears, such that it purchased physical stores, infusing the retail business with much-needed cashflow, then leased those stores back to the retail corporation. Again, ethical questions about the potential conflict of interest created by these multiple roles arose, but in its publicly available financial reports, Sears painted a rosy picture. Citing its efforts to unload underperforming assets and its new influx of capital, the retailer offered a positive outlook and promise of improved operations.

Rather than a rosy future though, "there were red flags from the beginning," according to one market analyst. In retrospect, it is evident that Sears's financial well-being was shakier than the public disclosures revealed. Sears Canada had just cut more than 1,500 positions, and sales figures continued to plummet. Even with these alarming developments though, the company seemed uninterested in supporting and meeting the needs of its brick-and-mortar stores—an error that failed to account for the historical source of the brand's value.

For as long as there had been a Sears Roebuck, there had been Sears department stores. Even as it introduced new e-commerce initiatives and delivery options, loyal customers still wanted to visit stores in person and shop in the ways they had long appreciated and embraced. Instead, especially in the years just prior to Sears' bankruptcy, shoppers increasingly complained about poor store maintenance and inconsistent upkeep. With the ready availability of competitive retail offerings, shoppers chose to look elsewhere, seemingly frustrated by both the conditions of the stores and the failure to acknowledge their nostalgic desire to have the same Sears they knew and trusted.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it fair to say that Edward Lampert bears most of the responsibility for the decline of Sears? What might be some additional factors that contributed to the decline, out of ownership's control?
2. What measures could have been put in place to stop Sears's losses from compounding?

Sources: Lauren Coleman-Lochner, "Why Sears's Last Great Hope Was a Promise that Never Materialized," The New York Times, December 26, 2025; "Sears Canada to Cut More Than 1,600 Jobs," Reuters, January 15, 2014.

Even for Tech Firms, Interpersonal Retailing Remains Key

Use with Chapter 3, “Digital Retailing”



istockphoto / grinvalds

As many news reports have made clear, the primary focus of Meta in recent years has been reaching the very cutting edge of innovative technologies. But even if its determination to lead the AI revolution and embrace a tech-forward perspective dominates the corporation's mission statement, those elements are not what keeps the company going.

Rather, to fund its vast technological explorations, Meta depends primarily on the revenues it earns from paid advertising on the social media platforms it owns, including Facebook. And on Facebook, many users devote a substantial amount of their attention to the Marketplace section of the app. It features more than 430 million products, added each month, about 44 million of

which are vehicles. Different sellers market their offerings in diverse ways, from one-time sellers looking to unload a mistaken purchase to essentially professional retailers who gather a specialized portfolio of offerings and market them actively. Although Facebook does not take any cut from sales that take place on the platform, it knows that a thriving Marketplace attracts more advertisers that will pay it to be placed in prominent visual locations.

In recognizing the substantial economic and social significance of Facebook Marketplace, Meta has diverted some of its attention to improving the retail experience available there. For frequent sellers in particular, it recently added the Seller add-on application, which will automatically sync their existing listings. The app promises to offer summary analytics, providing sellers more detailed information about which listings remain current and how long they have been on the site, along with how many clicks their listings have attracted and how many sales conversations are ongoing. It also offers pricing recommendations and highlights messages from potential buyers that have not yet been addressed. Furthermore, sellers can upload photos of their offerings to Seller's AI function and ask it to generate a basic description.

Yet at the same time it announced the introduction of Seller, with its AI-enabled features, Meta noted that it also would provide all Facebook users a means to verify their identity as actual persons, rather than bots. For users engaged in retailing activities on Marketplace, this simultaneous app expansion creates a meaningful way to reinforce the personal touch that makes Marketplace so appealing to many buyers. People searching for quirky decorations, deals on luxury goods, or a used vehicle often enjoy the search and the opportunity to connect, even if virtually, with others who have similar interests.

Thus, perhaps ironically for a company that seeks to automate and integrate AI everywhere, one of its most popular offerings, and a source for much of the earnings it reports, involves simple, person-to-person sales of virtually any product ever made.

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of retailing occurs on Facebook Marketplace?
2. How can individual sellers, engaged in retailing on Facebook Marketplace, more effectively engage buyers, using the new tools Meta has introduced? Suggest a strategy for a hypothetical seller.

Sources: Eli Tan, “Meta Gives Facebook Marketplace Its Own App Called Seller,” *The New York Times*, July 24, 2026; Paula Meija, “The One Place on Social Media that Still Feels Human,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2025.

Baby Steps: Little Spoon Revolutionizes Baby Food

Use with Chapter 4, “Multichannel and Omnichannel Retailing”



istockphoto / a_namenko

According to Angela Vranich, parents are no different from any other consumers: They want products that enable them to fulfill their goals. And for most parents, those goals revolve largely around taking the best possible care of their children. Although she first came up with the idea for Little Spoon to meet the requirements of a college project that tasked students with offering proposals for advertising organic food, Vranich quickly recognized the untapped market potential that existed among adult consumers who sought to not only eat organic foods themselves but also give their children natural food offerings.

After graduation, Vranich expanded the operations she had started in her dorm room to develop a line of wholesome, nutrient-dense baby food, made from fresh ingredients that had been sourced ethically. Building on the original puree blends, formulated for

infants, Little Spoon soon began extending its product lines, largely in accordance with children’s development milestones.

For example, as they reach the age of about 4 months, children can start eating cereals, so Little Spoon developed baby cereals that provide easily accessible sources of essential vitamins and whole grains. Most of the products are free of common allergens and include no extra additives or sugars. Then as their children grow, parents can switch to Little Spoon’s Babyblends+ ready-made meals and select the formulation they consider most important. One version contains ingredients believed to support brain development, another promises to boost babies’ natural immunity, and yet another line features probiotic-rich formulations, modeled after trendy gut health products but designed specifically to meet a baby’s needs. For toddlers, who are notoriously picky eaters, Little Spoon provides dedicated snack options that parents can make available to ensure their nutritional needs are met.

Beyond such age- and development-oriented product lines, Little Spoon is experimenting with new product variations that can extend its portfolio in other directions. Recent tastings and development strategy meetings featured new breakfast offerings, as well as seasonally introduced foods, such as a pumpkin spice smoothie. Another potential expansion would move the company into competing for a share of the children’s vitamins market.

Having convinced Target stores to stock most of its product offerings, in a deal reached in late 2025, Little Spoon needs to expand its production capabilities to match its growing product portfolio. At the moment though, Vranich and her husband continue to oversee the day-to-day workflows of the more than 100 employees that work both at the company’s New York headquarters and across remote locations.

Seeing something you’ve created grow and develop can be very rewarding—whether that something is a baby or a company. It’s also a lot of work, and it requires new resources at each stage. In this sense, Little Spoon might take inspiration from target consumers to plan its own expansion.

Discussion Questions

1. Is defining product lines according to young children’s development stages an appropriate strategy, or should Little Spoon adopt a different categorization?
2. How can the founder of Little Spoon continue to maintain control over the company while also scaling up its production capabilities?

Sources: Lia Picard, “How the Head of a Baby Food Company Spends a Day Taste-Testing,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2025; Will Newton, “Little Spoon Adds Pouched Meals,” *Food Business News*, June 5, 2025; Brooke Just, “Little Spoon Serves Up Organic Oatmeal Baby Cereal,” *Baking Business*, October 29, 2024.

Everything's Coming Up Rubirosa's: Inside the New Favorite of the Paris Fashion Crowd

Use with Chapter 6, "Retail Market Strategy"



istockphoto / sergeyryzhov

Ah, Paris. Known for its art, history, atmosphere, and cuisine, it also ranks as one of the fashion capitals of the world. For the past half a century, Paris has hosted four influential fashion weeks each year, along with design-centric events such as Art Basel Paris, Design Miami.Paris, and Paris Photo. But for experienced luxury shoppers, haute couture mainstays are not necessarily the most valuable finds. Instead, for those seeking truly unique clothing designs, the small, quirky retailers of Paris offer the greatest social currency, and Rubirosa's is the seller of the moment.

Featuring a colorful, eclectic mix of pieces and stories, Rubirosa's explicit purpose is to offer an alternative to the somber, monochromatic palettes that have dominated runways in recent seasons. Every item in stock is vibrant, available in inclusive size ranges, and promises wearable, high-quality material.

These offerings resonate with the story of the boutique: Its owner, Lauren Rubinski, is a third-generation independent retailer. Her grandfather was an accomplished tailor, specialized in textiles, who famously supplied the Vatican with material on occasion. Her father ran two successful shops, one located in Paris's prestigious Triangle d'Or—a haven for premium retail. Rubinski began as a jewelry designer, an experience that gave her unique insights into modern, high-end retail demands, as well as a sense of which specific elements would appeal to fashionable consumers.

With this foundation, Rubinski developed Rubirosa's to seem as if it contains a hodgepodge of items, while also ensuring that each product is carefully selected and curated, from pajamas that are meant to wear out after years of use, to heart-shaped accessories, to crocodile leather goods, to cashmere in every shade imaginable. Furthermore, her attentiveness to current trends encouraged Rubinski to embrace the appeal of unisex clothing. Many items on display in Rubirosa's feature elements that traditionally would be associated with menswear, such as high collars on pajamas and roomier cuts. The store's flagship button-down shirt is clearly inspired by men's professional suit attire, with a traditional point collar, though the option to add colorful trim points also encourages sartorial versatility and self-expression.

The store's interior echoes such intentions. The creative director uses bold design elements to highlight the playful goods. The striking exterior features stylized brass lettering and stylish wood paneling, a clever complement to the busyness of the ruched daisy curtains and rainbow of starched shirts presented on a bright red stand just inside the door. The result is a carefully designed appearance of chaos. For Rubinski, Rubirosa's should function like a "candy shop for adults."

And it appears fashionable consumers are ready for this kind of retail dessert. In 2025, Rubinski met her annual revenue goals within less than two months of opening. As the store continues to attract high-profile media attention, word of mouth, and strong sales, reports of a possible expansion already have started, a mere seven months after the original Rubirosa's opened its doors.

Discussion Questions

1. Rubirosa's relies on innovative products. How can Rubinski maintain a sufficient source of novel, interesting items, once people become familiar with what already appears in the store?
2. Could Rubirosa's undertake an international expansion, in your opinion, or is Paris critical to its brand identity? Why?

Sources: Alice Cavanagh, "The Small Parisian Shop that's Become a Retail Phenomenon," The New York Times Style Magazine, December 24, 2025; Lily Templeton, Rhonda Richford, Jennifer Weil, and Miles Socha, "Paris Scene: What's Hot," WWD, July 7, 2025; Melanie Masarin, "If You're Headed to Paris this Winter, I Have the Spots Everyone's Talking About Right Now," Who What Wear, November 14, 2025.

The Global Spread of Chinese Food Trends, from Bubble Tea to Hot Pot and Beyond

Use with Chapter 9, “Retail Site Location”



istockphoto / insjoy

Boba might have bubbled up (sorry) on nearly every U.S. street corner these days, but there was a time, not so long ago, that U.S. consumers eyed bubble tea with a mix of trepidation and confusion. Once they overcame their initial hesitation, and grew accustomed to the unique texture, boba drinkers became a powerful force and a novel retail market. Its emergence seemingly is inspiring other food retailers to pursue a similar path and introduce unfamiliar recipes and presentation styles to a willing consumer public.

Many of these initiatives involve Chinese sellers. China’s food and beverage market has become largely saturated and defined by price competition. The competition among large-scale suppliers to provide the most affordable product pricing has left them facing thin margins and struggling to survive. In need

of a new source of demand, U.S. consumers’ evolving palates seem to present a ready opportunity.

Accordingly, Luckin Coffee stores have popped up throughout New York City, as have HeyTea shops. The tea chain also has piloted stores in several additional markets; two locations in Houston, Texas, have reported notable success. The Wallace restaurant chain opened its first U.S. location in California, positioning its popular fried chicken as a tasty and more affordable alternative to existing fast-food chicken offerings. Although the Sichuan-based hot pot company Haidilao has had a presence in the United States since 2013, it more recently has been pushing for an aggressive expansion across the country.

As they undertake such efforts, Chinese food retailers encounter several notable regulatory barriers though. If they hope to go public in international markets, they must first seek approval from lawmakers in Beijing, which involves a formal, complex regulatory application and in-depth consideration.

Having obtained such approval, they also must decide whether and how to adjust their offerings and business models as they enter diverse regional markets in the United States. For example, Haidilao has defined different sets of expected behavior and services to be provided to Chinese versus U.S. customers. Retail interactions in China tend to be interactive, so staff are expected to provide lively entertainment, such as by dancing or offering to peel shrimp in front of customers. For diners waiting for tables, the restaurant provides free nail services. But U.S. consumers tend to appreciate stricter social boundaries and personal space, so staff working in U.S. locations are instructed to provide clear English instructions and minimize any service acts that might seem obtrusive.

In addition to service standards, these retailers adjust their menu offerings, such as by reducing spicy ingredients and expanding red meat options for U.S. diners. Wallace similarly swaps out lettuce with pickles for the chicken sandwiches it sells in the United States. Thus, we might view the first people to try bubble tea as open-minded experimenters, but Chinese food retailers increasingly are making it easier for U.S. consumers to try something just a little new.

Discussion Questions

1. What types of considerations and preferences should Chinese food retailers take into account when adjusting their offerings to appeal to U.S. consumers?
2. Should Chinese restaurant chains target multiple foreign markets, or is the United States the most promising market? Justify your answer.

Sources: Daisuke Wakabayashi and Joy Dong, “Get Ready, America: Here Come China’s Food and Drink Chains,” The New York Times, December 1, 2025; Selena Li, “Tea Company Chagee Gains Chinese Approval to List in US,” Reuters, March 6, 2025; Shafaq Patel, “Sweet Times: HeyTea,” Axios Houston, January 7, 2026.

How Major Retailers Are Tackling Self-Checkout Theft

Use with Chapter 12, “Managing the Merchandise Planning Process,” and Chapter 17, “Store Layout, Design, and Visual Merchandising”



istockphoto / anatoliycherkas

Self-checkout scanners are ubiquitous in retail stores today. Many retailers actively encourage shoppers to use them, seeking a means to reduce their own labor costs and create more efficient checkout operations. But such efficiency has an unintended, and decidedly inefficient, consequence: It appears to encourage retail theft.

According to one recent survey, more than one-quarter of all U.S. consumers admit to intentionally stealing items during self-checkout. Millennials were the most likely generational cohort to admit to such theft, at more than 40 percent of respondents. Right behind them, more than one-third of Gen Z respondents acknowledged such behaviors. In a stark contrast though, virtually no Baby Boomers indicated

they had stolen while checking out on their own.

Explanations for these generational differences are varied. Baby Boomers might argue that they are simply an inherently more honest generation, but others propose that they actually are less likely to admit to wrongdoing, out of a sense of fear or pride. Yet another explanation suggests that older consumers are less comfortable with self-checkout, so they simply don't use it, when given the choice. According to survey respondents though, a far more practical, economic rationale may be central: The self-admitted thieves committed their crimes out of financial necessity, reinforced by drastically higher prices on most consumer goods, which they perceived as deeply unfair. Another form of perceived unfairness, also cited by survey respondents, involved the task shift, such that self-checkout makes shoppers responsible for performing labor that previously was provided by retailers. For these consumers, the stolen items represent a sort of compensation for their time and effort.

Yet such economic justifications conflict with findings that consider consumers' income levels. Forty percent of shoppers whose households earn annual high incomes (i.e., more than US\$100,000) indicated occasional theft, whereas less than 20 percent of consumers in the lowest income bracket (i.e., combined households that earn less than US\$30,000) do so. Whether such trends reflect reality or biased survey results, they raise challenging questions when it comes to identifying who is stealing, and why.

Those questions continue to swirl as retailers report increasing rates of such incidents. In response, some supermarkets have removed self-checkout altogether, including most U.S. ALDI stores. Others instead have imposed stricter regulations and more efficient monitoring of the checkout areas. For example, in Walmart's "hosted" checkout areas, customers partner with an employee to scan their purchases. At Target, customers may only use self-checkout if their baskets contain 10 items or fewer. In parallel, some legislative bodies are considering implementing rules, such as the New York City Council's proposal to limit automated self-checkout uses to purchases of no more than 15 items, while also requiring retailers to assign a set number of employees to oversee the areas.

Such moves represent understandable responses to a serious problem, but just as was the case for the initial introduction of self-checkout options, the solution creates some unintended and difficult consequences. In particular, many consumers express strong preferences for self-checkout, due to the convenience it offers. (Their preference also might arise because they want to steal things, but that motivation is not something most people would admit to.) Customer retention and satisfaction rates, and even willingness to patronize a retailer, might decline if they face greater restrictions on their checkout options. Retailers must weigh the potential profit losses associated with the risk of theft against the potential revenue gains they could obtain from monitoring checkouts more closely. Such calculations also need to take into account the costs of rehiring more employees to monitor the transactions.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you steal while doing self-checkout? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of any other solutions that might mitigate the risk of theft during self-checkout, without inconveniencing customers or increasing labor costs?

Sources: Andrew Dorn, “More than 1 in 4 Self-Checkout Shoppers Admit They’ve Stolen: Survey,” The Hill, December 6, 2025; Gustavo Atencio Flores, “ALDI Is Making Major Changes at Some Stores, Reports Say,” MassLive, September 5, 2025; Henry Rosoff, “15 Items or Less: NYC Weighs Self-Checkout Changes,” PIX11, March 17, 2026.

In the Novel Popcorn Bucket Market, Movie Theaters Confront an Age-Old Challenge: Buying Just the Right Amount

Use with Chapter 13, “Buying Merchandise”



istockphoto / Cavan Images

Blockbuster movies represent cultural events. People flock to be among the first to catch the latest blockbuster, from Marvel and Star Wars films to 2023’s massively successful Barbie movie to 2026’s 70-millimeter extravaganza *The Odyssey*. So imagine: You’re a movie theater operator, selling a thrilling experience to a vast audience of willing consumers. They’re already in your retail location, and they are accustomed to spending money to enhance their experience with snacks and drinks. What else could you do to earn more of their entertainment budget?

Behold, the collectible popcorn bucket.

Rather than sell popped kernels in conventional paper bags, movie theaters have introduced “collectible

concession vessels” that hold moviegoers’ favorite snack in themed, plastic buckets that the fans can take home with them after the credits roll. The first of these collectibles was released in conjunction with the 2019 Star Wars installment, *The Rise of the Skywalker*. Disney licensed the likeness of the droid R2-D2 to a company called Golden Link, which created a 17-inch version to hold popcorn. It sold well, signaling massive consumer demand. In response, the market expanded, with prices to match. Today, some of the special, limited-edition receptacles retail for up to \$70, and resale markets among collectors exhibit even higher prices.

In an attempt to benefit from these opportunities, many studios have entered into partnerships with the three main bucket suppliers currently in existence: Golden Link (which mainly works with Disney), Snap, and Zinc. When these firms win a contract to provide the collectibles for a particular movie, they refer to it with a new verb: They “bucket” the film. The resulting bucketing contracts have proved remarkably popular and lucrative. According to AMC Theaters, buckets associated with the various movies it screens will earn \$100 million in revenue in 2026, which is approximately twice the amount it earned in 2023.

A brand new revenue stream, with benefits for multiple members of the supply chain (i.e., bucket suppliers, film studios, and theater chains), seems like a fairy tale. But creating a new retail market also inherently involves challenges, as became abundantly clear in relation to the popcorn buckets for *The Odyssey*. Snap produced two different versions: a recreation of the 70-millimeter IMAX camera that Christopher Nolan used to shoot the epic and a 22-inch-high Trojan horse, sold for \$50 and \$70, respectively. Worried that people would not really be interested in the technical details surrounding the camera used for filming the movie, IMAX ordered only 2,500 of this version to stock its U.S. theaters.

It sold out within just 90 minutes. The online orders came in even before the film opened. The theater company then scrambled to find more, requesting the products that had been slated to ship to China (where the movie opened later than in the United States). That shipment of 2,500 more camera buckets sold out in 7 minutes. In the meantime, Snap was busy manufacturing more of the buckets, such that IMAX estimates it has sold 30,000 of the collectibles.

It was fortunate to be able to find an alternative source, to make up for its insufficient estimates of actual demand. On the basis of its experience, other studios and theaters might plan to purchase more. For example, noting the “unbelievable”

demand for the buckets that Cinemark Theaters commissioned to commemorate the release of *The Devil Wears Prada 2*, one executive noted, “If I could do that one over again, I don’t even know if there’s a max I would buy.”

But predicting uncertain market demand, and then ordering an appropriate inventory level in this novel market, remains incredibly difficult, and ordering too much carries its own risks. Good predictive models are not yet available. For example, most analysts have proposed that demand for the collectibles comes mainly from younger, Gen Z consumers. But movies targeting this demographic have been responsible for some notable market failures. The *Supergirl* movie did not do well in theaters, and neither did its themed bucket, featuring the main character’s canine sidekick. *Masters of the Universe* also performed pretty poorly in terms of ticket sales, but its bucket outcomes varied: A version depicting Castle Grayskull (designed with a candy compartment and a detachable cup) sold massively, whereas the one made to look like Skeletor’s throne barely moved off theater shelves. Young viewers were the target markets for these films, whereas the popularity of the red, handbag-shaped buckets evoking *The Devil Wears Prada* sequel actually involved purchases by older women who had enjoyed the first movie when it launched, two decades ago.

The implications of poor buying decisions are critical. If they order too many, theaters are stuck with bulky, excessive inventory that they cannot easily sell, discount, or repurpose. Unlike conventional popcorn bags and paper buckets, the themed containers have a limited time appeal. Once the relevant movie leaves the theater, there’s virtually no more demand for leftover, unpopular vessels.

This challenge also appears likely to become even more pressing, as the bucket suppliers come up with new and more extreme versions. For example, marking a theater rerelease of a *Harry Potter* movie, filmgoers will encounter a four-foot replica of Harry’s broom, the bottom of which will hold 135 ounces of popcorn. Storing such large containers, in a way that still ensures they are food-safe, represents an ongoing challenge.

Other creative designs create an opposite problem, because in prioritizing the cleverness of the visual design, the resulting containers cannot hold enough popcorn to satisfy hungry filmgoers. Then theaters confront a different problem (or perhaps an opportunity) associated with forcing viewers to leave the film to come get refills of their snacks (and maybe buy something else while they’re there).

All these questions remain to be resolved. Like a good thriller, the twists and turns that have marked the storyline of this new market are holding the interest of a lot of audiences.

Discussion Questions

1. How should the sellers in this supply chain develop metrics to predict demand for collectible popcorn buckets for different movie releases? What are some of the factors they should take into consideration?
2. Who should be responsible for dealing with unsold collectible buckets: the supplier, the film studio, or the theater chain? How might these actors establish a fair method among themselves?

Sources: Nicole Sperling, “Salty, Buttery, Astonishingly Lucrative: The \$100 Million Market of Popcorn Buckets,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 2026; Matt Minton, “Popcorn Bucket Craze Pops Off with Skyrocketing Scalper Prices, Director Approvals and Imax’s First-Ever Movie Merch,” *Variety*, August 3, 2026.

Tip the Scales: Food Delivery Platforms Attempt to Block Tipping Laws

Use with Chapter 16, “Human Resources and Managing the Store”



istockphoto / choochart choochaikupt

Service charges and tipping are common in many societies, though in few countries are they as prevalent as they are in the United States. Driven in part by wage laws that allow food service workers to earn a different, lower minimum wage, tipping provides a subsidy to these workers' income. The ethics underlying tipping culture remain debated.

On the one hand, advocates of a higher mandatory minimum wage for restaurant workers argue that this policy would require restaurants to take responsibility for paying their employees a living wage and ensuring their income is sufficient, even if slow seasons, weather, or other factors outside their control lead to a slow shift. Tipping then becomes an expression of gratitude for exceptional service, not an expected cost of ordering food. On the other hand, service employees whose skills enable them to earn

substantial tips worry that their income would decline, and the restaurants that employ them argue that increasing servers' minimum wages is operationally unsupportable. If increased labor costs force restaurants to increase their retail prices, it could drive customers away, with detrimental implications for the business and its employees.

In response to such debates, New York City has sought a solution that can balance the two opposing views: It suggests options for encouraging larger tips for certain segments of workers, without actually mandating changes in the spending habits of either customers or businesses. Specifically, local laws 107 and 108 regulate the suggested minimum tip that appears on the displays proffered at takeout counters and by food delivery workers, to start at 10 percent. Customers still can choose whatever amount they want to tip, but the baseline amount is set at a consistent, and lower, level. Research has long shown that setting such baselines strongly influences consumers' perceptions of appropriate payment amounts, so the change might diminish the perceived pressure to provide substantial tips for simple service transactions.

Food delivery providers contest the effort though. Uber Eats and DoorDash filed a joint complaint, alleging that the 10 percent requirements violate the services' constitutional rights to freedom of speech, because they force them to communicate a predetermined, constraining message. The suit also outlines the potentially adverse effects of the legislation, including a threat of greater tipping fatigue among consumers. The U.S. District Court that heard the case dismissed it, with the judge ruling that the plaintiffs failed to demonstrate that a small change in their current tipping screens constituted a clear violation of their civil liberties. He added his opinion that the legislation actually increases transparency for consumers, while also protecting workers who depend on tips.

The battle in New York is relevant to restaurants and food service employees nationwide. The food delivery platforms certainly operate most intensely in densely populated areas (New York City residents spent more than \$250 million on takeout in the first six months of 2025), but changes to their operations in select cities are likely to spread more widely too. Other states already have taken up legislative debates about whether tipping should remain customary and unregulated or if more restrictive and protective measures are needed. In their attempts to do so, they might take into account the results of a recent study conducted by Toast, Inc., a restaurant software provider. It indicated that states with larger populations tend to report the lowest tipping averages; Texas, Florida, and New York rank among the lowest. Southern workers also tend to struggle with low tips, whereas the Midwest states represent the middle in terms of tipping averages too. It was two mid-Atlantic states, Delaware and West Virginia, that notched the highest diner contributions, exceeding 21 percent, followed close behind by New Hampshire and Indiana.

Discussion Questions

1. On what side do you fall in the tipping debate? What experiences in your own life have informed that opinion?

Sources: Matthew Haag, “Uber and DoorDash Try to Halt N.Y.C. Law that Encourages Tipping,” *The New York Times*, December 16, 2025; Erin Alberty and Sami Sparber, “At Utah Restaurants, Tips Still Lag,” *Axios* Salt Lake City, April 17, 2026; Jonathan Stempel, “Judge Rejects DoorDash, Uber Bid to Block New York City Tipping Laws,” *Reuters*, January 23, 2026.

Quiet Hours for Shopping: How Retailers Aim for Accommodation

Use with Chapter 17, “Store Layout, Design, and Visual Merchandising”



istockphoto / Pressmaster

Some retailers actively work to create excitement and interest by showcasing bright colors, blaring loud and boisterous music, and running constant video feeds. The distracting, noisy environment is, in a sense, the point. But for many shoppers, such environments are distracting, difficult, and even painful. Rather than excitement, they produce confusing, unpleasant experiences, which is the last thing a retailer wants to convey.

Whether consumers exhibit neurodivergent tendencies or simply are sensitive to loud noises and bright, moving displays, many of them have expressed clear preferences for less sensory-intensive, quieter settings. In response, a range of retailers have begun experimenting with sensory-friendly or quiet hours. During select times, the stores

turn off display monitors, lower the volume of any music playing (or stop playing any sounds at all), avoid emitting any strong scents (e.g., perfume, cleansers), and even dim the lights.

Sephora is the most recent retailer to announce such an initiative, noting that all of its stores will designate specific hours of sales days as quiet hours. Although the specific times are up to each store, it encourages them to establish calmer environments at least during the first hour or two that they are open on every Tuesday and Saturday. The earliest opening hours will vary, but the novel environmental design will be consistent in stores throughout the country. Before initiating the universal adoption, Sephora tested out this strategy in a select set of 32 stores, which provided it with clear insights into how best to serve customers with sensory sensitivities, even while attempting to sell products that tend to feature strong scents.

It is not the first retailer to adopt the offering though. Walmart began promising sensory-friendly hours several years ago. It also tested the concept before committing to a full rollout. Starting with just one day per week, the experiment proved so popular that in most of its stores, the retail giant offers quiet hours every day, for the first two hours the stores are open. For Walmart, the appeal of such a tactic reflected input from not just customers but employees as well. Employees with hyperactivity, autism, and attention deficit conditions note the very meaningful benefits, in terms of both their productivity and their personal comfort, associated with working mainly during quiet hours.

Some other retailers have begun experimenting with the idea as well, including Target and Chuck E. Cheese. Citing the “overwhelmingly positive” feedback that existing adopters have received in response to their efforts, one observer thus argues that quiet hours are the “future of retail.”

Discussion Questions

1. Should all retailers adopt the notion of quiet or sensory-friendly hours? Why or why not?
2. When various sensory elements are quieted, what can retailers do to engage or excite consumers, in a way that leaves them comfortable?

Sources: Sara Moniuszko, “Sensory-Friendly Hours Are Becoming Mainstream. Who Are They For?,” USA Today, July 28, 2026; Drew Pittock, “Sephora Launches Quiet Hours. Here’s What Shoppers Need to Know,” USA Today, July 29, 2026; Gabe Hauari, “Walmart to Start Daily Sensory-Friendly Hours in its Stores this Week: Here’s Why,” USA Today, November 8, 2023.

Tidbits

The Latest Developments in the Pizza Wars

Use with Chapter 8, “Retail Locations”

On nearly every financial metric, Domino’s is surpassing its previous performance, as well as its competitors. For example, relative to the same period in 2025, Domino’s has increased both its U.S. sales (by 1.9 percent) and its global sales (by 4.1 percent) in 2026. A recent quarterly profit report indicated a year-over-year increase of 3.6 percent, at the same time that, for example, Pizza Hut earned 16 percent less profit, and Papa John’s noted that its quarterly revenues were \$39.7 million less than in the year before. The reasons for its success seem to revolve around two main strategic choices. First, Domino’s has pursued aggressive and distinctive location expansions. It added a franchise in North Pole, Alaska (home to just 2,700 residents—and, allegedly, Santa), and it has delivered pizzas under Loch Ness in Scotland. In both cases, it leveraged its clever locational strategy as part of its advertising strategy, promoting these unique capabilities to demonstrate its ready availability, anywhere in the world. Second, its popular Rewards program has been effective in convincing new or lapsed consumers to give Domino’s a try, and then continue purchasing from it to build up their rewards.

Sources: Rolland Judd, “Not Papa John’s, Not Pizza Hut: This Is the Best-Selling Pizza Chain in the World in 2026,” *The Takeout*, August 2, 2026; Rolland Judd, “Santa Will Finally Be Able to Order Pizza with this Domino’s First,” *The Takeout*, December 10, 2025.